NUND RISHI

Dinanath Nadim

(After Mahjoor Kashimiri, Dinanath Nadim gave Kashimiri poetry a new diction, style and content, and thus enriched its genre to put it on par with poetry in developed languages. His floral offering to Nund Rishi is among the poems he wrote in the last phase of his eventful life.

With a heart pure
And focussed senses
Unto your calm disposition
Nund Rishi
I offer flowers to your name !
My core aglow, to your Kashimiriness
Your name I offer flowers to !
How many cravings, desires
Stand trampled upon here
How many buds winged,
Time and again
The unattired body
Subject to gust and gale.
O Rishi !
I offer flowers to your name !
Kashmiri tongue and kashmiri yearnings
Are but manifestations owed you
Long would the desert have claimed them
O Rishi !
I offer flowers to your name !
She[1] said I'll make the inner being
Of my child blossom

Weaned him on understanding and
Knowledge :
The very fragrance
Lives in the air around here
O Rishi !
I offer flowers to your name !
Nadim, through the elements
Does he send his message
Let me hark his word
Why do Kashmiris ridicule him so ?
O Rishi !
Your name I offer flowers to !

1. The reference is to Lal Ded, who is reputed to have suckled the infant Nund Rishi at her breast. This could be metaphorical, since Nund Rishi draws heavily upon the images of Kashmir Shaivism. Nund Rishi has also been spoken of as Sahazanand, Sheikh-ul-Alam and Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Noorani.
Additionally, the reference is to Kashmir, always referred to as Mother Kashmir by native Kashmiris. The poem, written in 1974, sounds prophetic 21 years on.

Translated from the Kashmiri by
SHANTIVEER KAUL

APOSTLE OF KASHMIRIAT

P.N. Jalali

Much to the disappointment of his detractors, Alamdar-i-Kashmir Sheikh Nooruddin Noorani has emerged nine feet taller after his ordeal by fire at Chrar, which was gutted and destroyed.

By razing has last resting place, the Pakistan backed merceneries had fondly hoped that the memory of the patron saint of Kashmir had been buried deep and his banner of Kashmiriat finally trampled. But their disappointment and frustration must be truly deeper now that the Sheikh's image in the process has emerged strongly and more deeply embedded in the Kashmiri psyche. It is heartening to note that overnight the great Sheikh's cause has become the major theme of contemporary debate in Kashmir, which lies ravaged as the terrorist campaign completes its fifth successive year. The soul stirring message that the standard bearer of Kashmir communicated to his people during his tempestuous life has suddenly come alive to the discomfiture of the fanatic votaries of hate and strife.

The new stirring of minds that is gradually coming to surface does not bode well for the gun weilding adventurers who did their worst to distort the sacred teachings of Noor-U-Deen Wali with the object of emasculating the Kashmiriat of its very substance-the soul uplifting humanism, non-violence and brotherhood in which everyone had a place, irrespective of his caste, creed and religion.

A daintly looking wooden structure, the Sheikh's masoleum was as simple as his life. There were no trappings of gold or silver attached to it; but associated with it was a 600 year old legacy which Kashmiris-hindus and muslims alike-cherished and valued as a priceless treasure trove from which they drew sustenance and solace in good and bad times.

Duling his own life-time, the saintly Sheikh had faced his foes boldly and refused to be treated as some sort of religious deadwood. The self appointed crusaders and religious fanatics of his day left

no stone unturned to involve him in their vile schemes and thus rob his message of the prestige and credibility that it enjoys today in the hearts and minds of ordinary Kashmiris. He spurned power and high social status and detested heirarchy, especially of the religious order. The Sheikh displayed no rancour or malice towards anyone and shunned all that brought comfort to the flesh and demeaned the spirit. While living in caves for penance and in the open to popularise his message, he did not choose the life style of the Rishis of yore, away from the maddening crowd. An accomplished seer and Rishi of Rishis, the great Sheikh whom the people affectionately call Nund Rishi, did not escape the din and storm of his days, but vigorously participated in the ongoing debate and thereby put his authoritative seal on subjects that agitated the minds of the people. What he opposed with all the force at his command was the strain of thought palmed off as religion that divided rather than bound human beings together. He was unsparing towards religious imposters and hypocrites, and scathingly commented on their fraudulent deals and opulent living styles.

Those who made his masoleum a plaything of their sordid game would have suffered a fuller exposure but for the inept and clumsy handling of the situation by the authorities, who underestimated the capacity of the enemy to indulge in the unexpected. The security forces who were apparently guided by the old Army Book, went about their job in an orthodox fashion, and were never able to clear the misconception that the holy township was never under the army's seige, which in actual fact was a concentration of troops at certain points around Charar thownship. The security forces and the authorities went about the job in a sloppy manner without being able to make it clear that it was not them who had seized the township or the shrine, but the Pakistan backed merceneries, whose presence in Charar was not meant for offering their respects and prayers at the shrine of the great Rishi, who was an apostle of non-violence and amity, but to unleash violence and provoke destruction.

The merceneries managed to keep their targets elusive, while the security forces kept

a static stance. Only at the end did the authorities wake up when the merceneries had done the meanly job, and Mast Gul, who had been lionised by Pakistani electronic media, slipped out of their grasp. Mast Gul's escape and the burning of the shrine exposed the security forces to the charge of failing in saving the masoleum and the township. Thus in the public eye, the crime committed by the merceneries went undetected, while the army was left holding the remains of a charred township and the shrine-a charge that could not be rejected outright and convincingly.

Pakistan had apparently rehearsed its act, and kept its propaganda mills well oiled to go into action, before the authorities in new Delhi and Srinagar could recover from their initial shock. And before new Delhi could get its act together, Islamabad had hijacked Sheikh Nooruddin to tell the world that India had done another Babri Masjid in Chrar township of Kashmir. Those who were assigned to counter the Pakistani propaganda failed to clarify that the Chrar shrine and the great Rishi movement it symbolised had absolutely no place in the religious blueprint that the terrorists and their mentors in Pakistan were trying to foist on Kashmiris. That Chrar was qualitatively a different type of shrine, reverred both by hindus and muslims, and was the embodiment of composite religious culture that this country espoused, did not figure in their calculations. Those who feigned anger and acted as the apologists of the merceneries and pakistan could be asked to explian what was the 'contribution' of Mast Gul and his band of merceneries in saving the shrine from the alleged 'incidiary plans' of the Indian security forces, who were nowhere in the township when the merceneries were fierecely busy in warlike preparations, digging trenches and laying mines to destroy Chrar and the shrine. As a devout muslim that he claimed to be, was it not the duty of Must Gul as the 'soldier of Islam' to save the shrine and even sacrifice his life for the noble objective ? Instead, he slipped out having satisfied himself that the task assigned to him by his ISI mentors had been accomplished.

From the day one, when Pakistan launched its proxy war in kashmir, the terrorists and

their Jammat-i-Islami backers had directed their tirade against the Rishi creed which has deep and firm roots in Kashmir. In fact while finalising their plans for initiating terrorist campaign in the Valley, the ISI and their jamaat henchmen had taken into account the 'obstacle' that the Rishi cult was in the fulfillment of their dark designs . At first they tried to appease the Rishis by sending batches of their trusted followers to their shrines to seek 'blessing for the success of the struggle against the infidels'. The Rishis did not oblige, and soon after rumours spread that 'Rasiwalas' (nickname for the section of Jamaat affliated terrorists who carry a rope with them to hang their victim) had been rebuffed and told to fold up. By late spring of 1990, people opposed to terrorists openly asserted, that Rishis were opposed to Azadi struggle and had declined to put their seal of assent on their request. Undaunted by those gloomy forecasts, the terrorists took out a procession from Srinagar to Chrar in early January of 1990, but it got bogged down on the way in the heavy snow storm, which was interpretted as a bad omen for the "Azadi" movement.

Having been thus rejected by the Rishis, the terrorists subsequently directed their ire against the Rishi shrines and reverred Khanqah's and made several attempts to destroy some of them through arson with a view to inflaming popular mind by putting the blame on security forces. Last year's seizure of Hazratbal shrine by the terrorists was an important development which demonstrated frustration of the terrorists and their mentors in Pakistan, who were increasingly resorting to the tactic of using religious shrines to drum up popular support and stem the tide of popular aversion against violence and immoral acts of the terrorists.

The terrorists, especially the Jamaat-i-Islami backed Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Harakat-ul-Ansar outfits enforced what looked like a ban on observing annual Urs at important shrines of the Rishis, including that of Zainshah Sahib near the famous tourist resort of Pahalgam in South Kashmir, where more than 20,000 peasants assembled to observe the festival of light, which heralds the sowing season in the Valley. There were encounters between the assembled peasants and armed members of the Hizb-

ul-Mujahideen, resulting in the killing of two innocents. Helpless against the armed might of the Hizb militants, the peasants agreed to pay ransom to buy peace under duress. Emboldened by their successes in supressing the voice of supporters of "Rishi" shrines, the terrorists headed by mercenaries finally struck at the hallowed seat of Alamdar-I-Kashmir to terrorise the Rishi shrines into submission.

Most students and commentators of Kashmir's Rishi movement have confused it with one of the 'maslaks' of the Sufi cult. No doubt there are many similarities between the Sufi cult and the Rishi movement of Kashmir, nevertheless there are several characteristics which distinguish one from the other. the Rishi cult in Kashmir is not woven merely around one great personality, but is a movement which had a wide religious ideological sweep linking itself to a fountain-head that was strictly indegenous. It did not cater to power nor sought the patronage of those seated on the highest pedestal of the State.

The Risihi movement under the Sheikh demonstrated its strength through sheer force of sprituality and attempted to unite the people at one of the crucial times in the history of Kashmir. It was the time when hundreds of Syeds, escaping the wrath of Timur, arrived in the Valley and established a chain of madrasas and maktabs throughout Kashmir. Like their Brahmin predecessors who used Sanskrit for teaching, the Syeds used Persian and manipulated levers of power to gain positions of privilege so much so that they succeeded in foisting a code of religious rule, which was unjust and harshly discriminatory towards one cummunity. It was in this background that Sheikh Nooruddin's Rishi movement emerged as a repository of enlightenment in an era when force and fanaticism sought to take the upper hand in the Valley. Sikander But-shikan and his Wazir Seha Bhatta or Saif Malik perpetrated atrocities on the members of one community and enforced a code of conduct, which they felt was not only harshly discriminatory but a virtual genocidal drive against natives. The Rishi movement, whose objective went beyond the limited target of preventing atrocities committed in the name of religion, struck at the very roots of philosophy of hate.

The most outstanding achievement of the Rishi movement was that it succeeded in winning the battle of minds in an atmosphere of bigotory and hate, when state power completely identified itself with one religion. There is no evidence to show that the patron saint of kashmir established patshalas or madrassas to teach the precepts of his movement, nor did he codify it as a separate church based religion. He was 'Tapasvi' or a "Sahazanand" to hindus and a "Wali" to muslims but lovingly rembered by all as Nund Rishi.

The great Sheikh did not establish "Maths" or endowments supported by landed estates gifted by the reigning king to sustain a costly religious order. In fact he scruplously avoided associating himself or his movement with the state power or seek any support from the king. The Chrar shrine has never sought protection from anyone, the soldier or monarch, not to speak of the gun weilding adventurer. On the contrary, rulers wanting popular approval had to identify themselves with the great Sheikh and the ethos he represented. The Alam-dari Kashmir became the target of intrigues by offical religious heirarchy, who had ordained that king espousing Islam was unacceptable if he did not mould his regime to serve the tenets of Islam as defined and interpretted by them. Jona raja, the official chronicler of Badshah the great says, Noor-U-Deen was detained. He calls him 'Param Guru".

The crux of his message was that the priests and pandits or mullas sought to disorient minds and used the pulpit to fortify their authority. Rishi strain of religion in Kashmir is not one-man devotional cult, but a popular movement which provided a cushion to the demand for retaining some of the indegenous rituals and styles of worship or "Ibadat" in Islam. Interestingly almost all the Rishi shrines in the Valley go vegetarian during "Urs" festival, thus predating the advent of islam in Kashmir. An important landmark of his life was presentation of "Khate Irshad' by Syed Hamdani, the great Syed who introduced Islam to Kashmir and made it popular.

Perhaps Nund Rishi's outstanding contribution towards widening the base of Islam was to conceptualise holy Quran as "Sahaz Quran". In

one of his famous "shruks', he put his concept in the following words : haz Rasulas kasmat Zaji Tsey tus soozuth Sahaz Quran" Sahaz is a concept also common to Buddhism and Shavism, which seeks enlightenment through introspection, thereby linking the new with old and overcoming the antogonism between two religious thoughts.

The Sheikh's message emphasised that truth is perceived not merely through formal education of religions, but through inner cleansing, penance, fasting and self abnegation, by deep meditation and introspection, a field where there are no barriers to realisation of enlightenment. It is such enlightened souls who give moral and ethical content to human civilisation. Without Nund Rishi and his predecessor Lalla Arifa, the religious soul of Kashmir would have remained a barren field.

A running thread of the Sheikh's famous sayings called shruks is the blistering attack on half baked and ill-educated Mulla, who buttersses his dogmatic half truths with as much zeal as he 'gulped down tasty dishes.' Yet in another Shruk he said, "I saw priests blowing fire (of hatred), beating a drum to others; they have nice big turbans on their heads and walk daintly dressed in preistly robes, but indulge in mutton and finally bolt away with cooking pots under their arms !"

He also found them "handling a rosary like a snake, bending it only on seeing a disciple. They eat six platefulls, one after another., If such are the priests, who then are robbers ?" the Sheikh asked.

And having seen through the false teachings of Mullas and Pandits, the Sheikh in a tellling verdict against this tribe "Do not go to Sheikh, priest and Mulla : Do not feed the cattle on Arkhur (poisonous weed) leaves; Do not shut thyself in mosque or forest. Enter thine own body with breath controlled in commmunion with God."

There are incidents that powerful elements had joined their hands to contain, if not sabotage, the increasing influence of the Sheikh on the popular mind. A few instances will suffice to illustrate the point:

The great Sheikh lost his infant children while in the cave at Kaimoh village in South Kashmir. Suddenly a 'myst-erious agency' deputes people to Srinagar with the message that the Sheikh had committed a double murder. The

authorities in post haste depute a police official Taze Bhatt to arrest the Sheikh, who rails to implement the order. On the contrary Taze Bhatt is so deeply influenced by the Sheikh's personality that he renounced offical position and became one of his disciples.,

Second instance is that of Sultan Sikander contracting an incurable disease, and the clerics and fanatics around him joining their hands together to convince the king that the illness was inflicted on him because there was a 'hypocrite' in his kingdom., who had gone unpunished.

The Sheikh had all the contempt for the religious snobs or high brow Mullas, whom he dubbed as 'Mael' or more contemptuously as "Awzont", a description which befits the present day Jamaat-i-Islami clerics, who claim to have superior knowledge as an exclusive caste of people, for whom dissent is an anathema. In the later years of his life, the Sheikh appears to have devoted his power of persuation and argument to warn the people against the insidious impact of such forces on the social life of the people. The core of his message was that one's convictions are designed or modelled, and even changed, not merely by claims of high flown religious office., but rather by actions which have wider social acceptance, and not by sermons. In a couplet of much social significance, the Alamdari Kashmir told his people that 'during this iron age. I found liars prospering, and in the house of pious I detected grief born of poverty". Should we not endeavour to change this social reality, as a fitting tribute to our great Faqir philosopher, the beloved Nund Rishi.

The Sheikh's saga would be incomplete without making a mention of the spritual debt he owed to Lala Arifa, popularly known as Lal Ded, from whose breasts he suckled "gulp after gulp" of spritual knowledge at the time of his birth after he refused his mother's milk.

The great Sheikh and Lalla are two flaming spritual torches, which kashmiris will hold aloft to foil the evil designs of forces of hate and strife.

FOOTPRINTS OF RISHIS

Mash'al Sultanpuri

'Reshut', an all embracing spritual movement that originated with the advent of Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Noorani, has left an abiding impact on the minds of Kashmiris. Its sweep is widespread and its impact on the religious and social fabric of the Valley enduring. 'Reshut' has shaped the psyche of an average kashmiri and his outlook towards his fellow beings.

The Rishi cult in Kashmir can be traced to antiquity. During its evolution, it had to contend with a number of sects and their respective doctrines, but far from adopting a confrontationist or a hostile attitude, the Rishi movement absorbed all that was good in these schools of thought and philosophic systems. In due course of time, it developed a specific individuality of its own. 'Reshut' is indeed totally indigenous to Kashmir.

Despite their proximity to the Rishis of Vedic lineage, Kashmiri Rishis evolved a life style of their own.; combining meditation and solitude with an active social life. They increasingly turned towards common people in times of crisis and took important initiatives for social reform and general welfare. Their teachings were outcome of a synthesis, whose elements were obtained from a mix of the Buddhist 'Madhyamika' (The middle path) the Shavite concept of 'SPAND' (Divine vibration) and the secret doctrines and practices of the Islamic sufis, who had evolved theories and practices related to the concept of 'wahdat-ul-wajood' or the 'Oneness of All Existence'.

The Rishi movement's reach was so all pervading that even princes and monarchs were persuaded to abandon their thrones and relinquish kingdom to join the Rishis as their desciples. Kalhana Pandit's Raj Tarangni, gives graphic details of how princes and kings surrendered themselves to Rishis and subsequently lived as religous ascetics. Kashmir has reserves of traditional literature and floklore which throw ample light on the lives and teachings of Rishis. Abu-Fazl, the noted chronicler and prominent

courtier of Akbar the Great, had this to say about Kashmiri Rishis.

"They are true worshippers of God, though they refrain from exhibiting any religous zeal. They aren't opposed to any sect, community or religion, and generally keep themselves busy with planting fruit trees and other socially useful pursuits. They abstain from meats of all types and lead a strict ascetic life."

Fortunately for us, masoleums, tombs and other monuments built in memory of these saints and saintesses remain largely preserved, thanks to genius of our people, who took great care in preserving relics and artefacts left over by Rishis from destruction or loss owing to ravages of time. Following is a summarised account of the masoleums, tombs and relics of our saints existing at different places in the Valley.

Such an account will naturally begin with Nund Rishi Hazrat Sheikh-ul-Alam (RA), who can rightly be described as the greatest of our Rishis, at least in recorded history.

Just one kilometre away from the main Chrar-e-Sharief masoleum, we come across a stone which was used by Nund Rishi to pound dried vegetables for his meals.

In village Zaloosa, the spot where Nund Rishi had a long discourse with Hazrat Meer Syed Mohmad Hamdani, is still preserved and held sacred by the people.

In village Kaimoh (Distt. Anantang) we have the following relics of Nund Rishi.

1. A mortar of granite stone.

2. A wooden cup which could contain milk.

3. A cotton grament Kashmiri 'Pheran'.

Tombs of almost all the important Rishis running in succession from Nund Rishi downwards, are rather well preserved in the Valley at various centres. Among them are : Tomb and Masoleum of Hazrat Zain-ul-Deen Rishi (Aiash Muqam, Pahalgam); Tomb of Baba khayam-U-Deen Rishi (Manz Gam, Devsar, Anantnag); Tombs of Hazrat Sadur-Deen and Deti Rishi (Tangmarg); Tomb of Baba Feroz Rishi (Nagam); Tombs of Sada Rishi, Zeni Rishi, Feroz Rishi (Khal narwaw); Tombs of Saintesses Dahat Bibi and Bahat Bibi (zaloosa Nagam); Tomb and Masoleum of Baba Nawroz Rishi (Chak Dar, Bijbihara) Tomb of Baba nawroz

Rishi second (Lolpora); masoleum of Baba Hardi Rishi (Anantnag) Tomb of Baba Gangi Rishi (Wanigam Anantnag); Tombs of Baba Naseeb Din and Shankar Rishi (Bij Bihara).

In addition to these tombs and masoleums, a large number of ponds, caves and other spots have been identified where our Rishis meditated for considerable periods of time. These places are considered holy by Kashmiris, hindus and muslims both.

The relics left over by Rishis have been preserved for posterity by dedicated bands of their followers whose number still runs into thousands. Most of the relics consist of wooden or grass sandals, cotton or woollen 'Pherans' wooden cups for drinking milk, mortars and grinding stones used by Rishis for pounding dried vegetables.

"Urs" or annual festivals are held at all masoleums in Kashmir in memory of Rishis. On these occasions, sermons about the beliefs and teachings of the Rishis are delivered to the pilgrims. Meat eating is strictly prohibited around several of these shrines during 'Urs' days. Mutton, eggs and fish are strictly prohibited in the entire Anantnag town for seven days during the annual 'Urs' of Baba Hardi Rishi celebrated with great religious fervour and solemnity. Similarly, during the annual urs of Nata Rishi in village Dolipora Trehgam, people of the area eat cooked raddish only, because for most part of his life, Nata Rishi ate raddish only. On the occasion of the urs of Sheikh Mehsin Rishi alias 'Haq' Baba pilgrims eat saltless kashmiri Haq (cellery) only because Mehsin Rishi was fond of this vegetable and for most part of his life, ate rice and haq only. Similarly on the occasion of Baba Payamdeen's urs, people eat beans and turnips only Pilgrims in the Rishi's masoleum in Peereen Baramulla abstain from eating meet or fish during the pilgrimage days.

A great majority of Kashmiris are 'iatiqadis', that is those who repose deep faith in spritual personalities of the bygone era. Kashmiri poetry, both folk and regular, abounds with devotional songs written in memory of Rishis. These songs are recited at their masoleums throughout the year. Here is a 'Shruk' from Hazrat Baba Naseeb Deen written in praise of Nund Rishi, as a sampler :

Hazratan tse tchui zima

Kormut

Koshir Souri

Yuith tith Koshir Gulam Chauni

Ya Noordeen Noorani

Prophet (let peace be upon him) has entrusted us to you, We Kashmiris are under your command.

Whatever be our fate, we Kashmiris are your slaves

O ! Noordeen Noorani.

Kashmiri folklore is rich with Sheikh's momory and his noble deeds. One such folk-song which is commonly sung by farmers while at work runs as follows :

Nawas lagai Nund Rishi yae lo

Hawas gandae zuv vashi lo!

Kashir tu Koshir zew rovith

Bawath gomutch adkhasiae lo

I offer myself to your name, O Nund Rishi

My soul is at your disposal

Kashmiris and Kashmiri language remain stiffled

Unable to express their grief.

Kashmiri folk poetry rather excels in devotional songs and a large part of this poetry is dedicated to memory of Rishis and other saintesses like Lal Ded. These songs are usually sung at harvest and marriage festivities.

Courtsey 'Reshiat'

Translated by BUSHAN BHAT

WOMEN IN RISHI MOVEMENT

Rashid Nazki

The two most notable Rishis who were to emerge in Kashmir during the onset of Islam were Nund Rishi and Lal Ded. Lal Ded who preceded the Sheikh was the first great saint-poetess of the Valley who left an indelible mark on the mental make-up of the Kashmiris and our own history.

She was an experimentalist and her powerful expressions changed the course of her times. Though she was born in an orthodox Hindu family, she promoted monism and divinity in opposition to idol-worship and precepts of duality.

By a stroke of genius, Lal Ded was able to strike a fine balance between islamic and Hindu concepts about life and divinity. Her systematised concepts were taken over by Hazrat Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Noorani and developed further in the name of 'Reshut' or Rishi movement, which has influenced and permeated almost all aspects of kashmiri life, culture, arts, education and folklore. 'Reshut' is part of the collective subconscious of Kashmiris.

It is widely believed that Lal Ded had her sights fixed on Nund Rishi right from his infancy. The tradition says that Lala breast fed the infant Nund Rishi after he refused to have his mother's feed. By breast-feeding, Lala is belived to have in fact given bountifuls of divine enlightenment with every gulp that Nund Rishi took from her. Lala was a wandering ascetic, engaged in constant spritual introspection. She had thoroughly examined the world around her, and abandoned her earthly comforts for realisation of the ultimate. She broke away from worldly attachments with the fire of her divinty. She turned to poetry to express herself in what has come to be known as 'Vakh' style, a poetic from of expression, which largely remained unbroken and was continued by all the Rishis subseqent to her departure.

Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Noorani, popularly known as Nund Rishi also adopted the poetic form of expressing his great spritual ideas and discourses. This tradition was continued by notable saintesses

Sham Bibi, Dahat Ded and Behat Ded. Lal Ded, however, was the most renowned of our saintesses, excelling everyone else in thought,. content and style. Kashmiris rightly call her their spritual mother. It was because of her influence that Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Noorani, towards the end of his life, took some women saintesses in his circle of desciples.

Among the earliest of saintesses was Nund Rishi's mother, popularly called Sodur mauj. All we know about her is that she was married to a shepherd. She became a widow at an early age and was subsequently married to Sheikh Salarudeen, Nund Rishi's father. The marriage was brokered by Samnani Baba Saman Rishi. However, our historians have hardly done any worthwhile research on the later part of her life, the kind of relationship she had with her son Nund Rishi and her ultimate fate.

The other woman saintess after 'Sodur Mauj' was Nund Rishi's wife 'Zai Ded'. She was the daughter of Hazrat Akbar Deen, a rich man of village Tral. She gave birth to two children.

Another saintess, Sham Bibi, was among the earliest of Nund Rishi's desciples. It is said that while she was on way to her in-laws house in village Honchipora Khag, in a planquin, she suddenly came across Nund Rishi, whose mere sight of her evoked deep and devotional feelings in her. Something rattled inside her heart and she at once jumped out of the planquin and fell on Nund Rishi's feet and implored him to take her as his desciple. The Rishi tried his best to forbade her but she insisted frantically and threw her garments and ornaments.

Thereafter she was admitted by Nund Rishi into his fold. She devoted her whole life to spritual persuits. She ate wild celeries and jungle berries only and nothing else. Apart from several sayings attributed to her, she wrote the first elegy in Kashmiri on Nund Rishi's demise. The first line of the elegy runs as

Kesh : (Nund Sanz goa Saurgus motia)

Eng. (Nund Rishi fell in love with Heaven)

Sham Bibi spent the later part of her life with Baba Latif-U-Din Rishi. She was buried in village Poshkar.

Bahat Bibi

Historians believe that Bahat Bibi and Dahat Bibi were

the daughters of a patwari of Draygam and had become Nund Rishi's disciples at a very early age.

it so happened that while Nund Rishi was walking along a meadow with a stick in his hand, he saw two girls plucking wild vegetables. The Rishi advised them against plucking fresh vegetables, because they were living things. The girls did not get convinced and mockingly told him that his staff must have been responsible for the death of a number of insects and other living creatures. On hearing the taunting remarks from the girls, he carried a long discourse with them and soon thereafter, both renounced their homes and became his desciples. Bahat Bibi earned her own living and fed herself on barley only. She used to tell people that the existence of the body itself was an obstacle between the luminous soul and God. She was an embodiment of devotion. Her tomb is situated in village Zaloosa.

Dahat Bibi

Most of the historians believe that she was the sister of Bahat Bibi. Others believe that she was her spritual sister. Dahat Bibi was present at the historic meeting that took place between Hazrat Meer Mohmad Hamdani (LA) and Nund Rishi. Hazrat Meer wanted to know why Nund Rishi was so thin and frail. Dahat Bibi answered on his behalf and said, "People in persuit of the ultimate truth attach no importance to the body". "Are you spritually liberated", asked Hazrat Meer of Dahat Bibi whereupon she replied that if she were not, she would not be a "participant in the august company of Hazrat Meer and Sheikh ul-Alam and would not be delivering answers". Hazrat Meer again asked whether she was a daughter or son (male or female). She answered that if she "were non-existent, she would neither be male nor female, meaning that the Rishi cult made no distinction between male and female because both are products of one enduring reality. The ultimate is neither he nor she. The dialogue between Hazrat Meer and Dahat Bibi is so long that it is not possible to reproduce it here.

Shang Bibi or Yavan Matsi

Shang Bibi was a dancer of great repute. She was exceedingly beautiful and possibly a courtsean. It is said that some poeple induced her to pay a visit to Nund Rishi's hermitage and tempt him with

her cocquetish behaviour and dancing. They wanted to put Sheikh-ul-Alam on test. Shang Bibi obliged them and went to Nund Rishi's hermitage at Nowshehra along with her troupe. She put up a splendid show but in the midst of her dance, Sheikh Noor-u-Deen asked her to stop and see her face in a mirror. She was stunned to see her countenance in the mirror as that of an old wretched woman. She fainted in horror and after being brought back to conciousness, wept at Noordeen's feet. She renounced her dancing carrier and became a desciple of the great Rishi, and lead a strict ascetic life. She was buried adjacent to the tomb of Hazrat Sheikh Noor Deen Noorani at Chara-e-Sharief.

Shanga Bibi second

She was the desciple of Baba Shakoor Deen Rishi. She had a permanent physical disability and despite her illness, lived a complete ascetic life in a forest about eight miles to the North of modern Bandipora. It is said that she could ride on leopards. A desciple of hers was one day attacked by a leopard. Shang Bibi asked the leopard why it was attacking an innocent man ? The leopard left thereafter without harming the desciple. Shang Bibi's tomb is situated in Babtho.

Courtsey "Reshait"

Translated by BUSHAN BHAT

'RESHUT' AND SELF DENIAL

Rasool Pompur

Controversies relating to questions of origin and fate of our infinite universe and our place in it, have been the subject matter of all sciences, philosophies and religions right from the outset of civilisation. Dogmas and restrictive modes of thought never prevented the lovers of God from pursuing the path of truth with single minded devotion. In fact, human quest for truth transcends all man made boundaries. Dr. Iqbal has expressed it so beautifully :

The tumult of the world is due
man's passion
Sun is otherwise, as good a spectator
As moon and stars.

Life is a constant struggle against worldly temptations, which tend to delude a person. A truly liberated man has his luminous self fully revealed to him with his mind under his control. It is such emancipated persons who steered human society clear from anarchy and self desruction and set it on the path of peace and stability at critical junctures. Civilisation would long have consumed itself through strife, hatred and bigotory : but for the contribution made by the pious and noble among men. The Indian sub-continent has been a melting pot of many civilisations, races, religions and thought processes, which influenced the Greeks and Arabs to realise that India was the fountain head of all that is great in Vedas, Upanishids Buddhism and the Bakhti cult. With the advent of Islam in the subcontinent, Indian civilisation received fresh impetus for self renewal and growth.

The beginning of civilisation gave rise to two contradictory tendencies in human beings, one towards complete satisfaction of carnal desires and the other to its opposite-spritual clam and contentment of the inner self. The emprical self is believed to be the substratum of strife and tension in the society. In order to escape from its ravages, the civilised human being sought refuge in caves, forests and other isolated places for realising the great truths, which lay hidden under the illusory wrappings of civilisation. This

quest for self-realisation was necessary for saving human societies from decay and decline. People who took to difficult path were known by several names such as monks, saints, Babas, Sadhus, Rishis and sufis. The word 'Rishi' is of Sanskrit origin, meaning one who has renounced the world of appearances for reality through rigorous self-denial. India has been a land of sadhus and Rishis. Their dwelling places were called 'Ashrams', which were generally situated in mountains and forests, far from the maddening influence of urban centres. The Ashrams of the Rishis were centres for development of philosophical thought in India. The part played by the forest in the evolution of Indian thought has deservedly won recognition in modern times.

The Nilmat Purana, the ancient most Purana of Kashmir, refers to Rishis and Munis both of Aryan and Naga origin, who devoted themselves to self realisation. Following verse from Nilmat Purana confirms this practice.

"Afterwords, other Gods, erected their hermitages, each one separately, in the lake or on the waterless places. The sages, whose wealth is penance, erected hermitages on river banks and thus created several places for pilgrimage".

The beautiful vale of Kashimir with its verdant forests and snow capped mountains provided an ideal opportunity to seekers of truth for meditation and worship. The land has variously been named as Shiv Bhoomi, Bodhi Sattva Asthapan, Reshi and Peer vaur. A great Buddhist council was convened during Kanishka's reign in Baramulla, a township in Kashmir's North West. The deliberations of the council were written in Sanskrit on Boj patras and copper plates, thus preserved for posterity. Nag Arjuna, Naga Sen and other Buddhist luminaries developed their lofty philosophic ideas in Kashmir. It is from this land that monks like Kumar Jeeva, Dharmasen and Guna Verman spread the message of Buddhism in China and to far away Japan. The Valley was a famous learning centre of philosophy, religion and aesthetics. Scholars from far and wide, including remarkable personalites like Chi Manj, Fa-Hian and Hewon Sang visited this place and wrote numerous works about local customs, beliefs and religions.

From the middle of eighth

century, Shavite religion gradually started replacing a weakened Buddhism, which had lost a lot of gloss for want of State patronage. In the ninth century A.D., Vasugupta laid the theoritical foundations of Shaivism in the form of Shaiva sutras, which are emodiment of strict monism. Shaivism was open to all, irrespective of one's caste, creed and relegion. Perhaps it was influenced in this score by Buddhism. Shavism rejected the notions of 'mayavad' which regards the world around us as illusion. The greatest exponent of this philosophy, Abhinava Gupta, was an alround genius who wrote commentories on aesthetics, literature and musicology also. It is said of him that, at the fag end of his life, he alongwith with some 1200 desciples entered a cave in village Beero only to disappear into heaven.

Kashmir had commercial and trading links with China, Persia and Arabia. In the middle of 14th century, the reigning monarch of Kashmir, Renchen Shah, was converted to Islam by Sharaf-U-Din Bulbul, an Islamic scholar who had come to Kashmir from iraq. It may be pertinent to note here that Shaivism had over the years, become religion of Brahminic elite only. Common people had Buddhist leanings, and they found it easier to embrace Islam. Bulbul shah's efforts were reinforced by Hazrat Shah Hamdan, who preached Islamic gospel in every nook and corner of the Valley.

Many Islamic scholars have tried to prove that realisation of God head is extremely difficult or almost impossible through the path of 'Reshut'. But it can be proved that during the lifetime of Prophet (peace be upon him) people like Bilal Habshi, Bilal Romi, Sulman Farsi and Owes Qurni had already adopted the path of 'Reshut'. Right from day one and during the reign of Ammavid and Abassi dynasities, it is the great Islamic sufis, who succeeded in converting large number of pagans and others in Africa and Asia to Islam. What Islamic zealots and kings could not achieve by swords and arms, the Sufis did by virtuousness, self abnegation and sacrifice.

Every nation and coummunity has its own history, culture, customs and language unique to its genius. Prior to the onset of Islam, Kashmiris used to call their saints as

Rishis. The history of Kashmir, in fact starts with the name of Kashyap Rishi. Rishis in Kashmir were distributed among three groups, namely Dev Rishi, Brahm Rishi and Raja Rishi.

The word Rishi Continued to be appended to spiritually oriented people in Kashmir even after the advent of Islam.

The pracice of 'Reshut' like self abnegation and renunciation are contrary to the teachings of Islam. Prophet (peace be upon him) was a symbol of struggle and constant practice. He combined sprituality with an active social life. The Holy Qoran advises against extremes in self restraint and physical denial. Allah has enjoined upon his people to struggle in life for satisfaction of mundane desires albeit in moderate forms. Qoran detests celebacy. Path of liberation lies through sincere performance of Nammaz, Haj and Roza (fasting). Fear of God and complete submission to His will and commands is a condition prescedent for anyone wishing to enter heaven as per the injunctions of Holy Qoran.

To conclude, it would be correct to say that Hazrat Sheikh Noordeen Wali was the greatest of our Rishis, who combined in himself the best in Rishi tradition and Islamic thought. His light contiunes to illumine our dark alleys as do sun and moon. In his own life time, he overcame all obstacles in the path of enlightnment, be it parental attachment or the charms of a married life. Prior to him Shiv Yogini Lal Ded had also adopted the same path and merged with the absolute.

Courtsey Reshiat

MY CHILDHOOD OF YORE

Ghulam Rasool Santosh

(One of the front ranking artists of India, Mr. Ghulam Rasool Santosh is also a renowned Kashmiri poet.)

The mirror
of the true, straight path
Was my mother's bequest !
One vision of twin eyes
Nursing the dear child with love.
Meanings curled :
Soderbal[1], Harmokh[2] heights
Sound milched :
Spring, Fount of Ragas
Raginis.
Pure lake nestled in mountain gorge
Factor of time.
Snow capped peaks
Kissing the forehead of sky
Pine forests a-riot with gazelle leaps
Lovely ringlets creeping down
From the sunshine of Haar[2a]
Waterfalls descended from hills
Rippling with laughter over meadows
Velvety pollen come from the woods
Robin and rhrush, vocal on snow laden branch
Cuckoo call under chinar shade in for villages

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1. Soderbal : Literally, place of the (inland) sea; a place in Srinagar, Kashmir. 2. Harmokh : Literally, the countenance of Shiva; a mountain in Kashmir. Haar : The month of Ashadh, the sunniest month in Kashmir.

Awakening the rhythm of life
In willow groves.
Roff[3] and Vanvun[4] hovering
Around gathering twilight.
Fairy voices crooning the Vyoog[5] songs
Ritual passage - offering6 of the Naags[7]
The fire ravaged Dal[8] is all lament today !
The whole world would seek its image
In my mirror
What do I do, my own sight
Is moth eaten
Shall I pull the stars down, ask them :
Did you happen to see my childhood of yore ?
Parbath[9], manifest next to Soderkhon[10]
Is my express history
The earliest truth was Satisar[11], Neelnag[12] .
Celestial beings met in heaven, decided :
Our habitat is the 'Sa-land'[13]
With Kashyap's[14] call was revealed
Kashmiri, Kashmir
The Vitasta[15], flowing unclad, is Kashyap's call Yet.

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3. Roff : Traditional folk music/dance, celebratory in nature. 4. Vanvun : Traditional wedding songs. sung in welcome, 5. Vyoog : ritual sanctified space marked on earth with rice flour for bridegroom. 6. Passage offering : Ritual gift for the bride on her visits to the parental home. 7. Naags : Traditionally regarded as the earliest inhabitants of Kashimir, also several springs named after them. 8. Dal : The Famous Dal lake at Srinagar, dal also means a large body of water. 10. Soderkhon : Literally lap of (inland) sea; another name for nagin lake. 11. Satisar : Traditionally regarded as the name of the great inland sea which was drained by the sage Kashyap to reclaim the submerged Kashmir Valley. 12. Neelnag : Traditionally the chieftain of Naags (See 7) Usa the old name of Verinag the source of river Jhelum; the source of Neelmat Purana. 13. Sa-land : Reference to the name given by Lord Krishna to Kashmir, as referred to in Neelmat Purana. 14. Rishi Kashyap : (See 11) 15. Vitasta : The original name of river Jhelum. Kashmir was also known as Vaitistika.

Encountering sin it recessed underground Often.
Holding the benighted Vitasta aloft
Today we recede.
Budshah[16], in abiding faith
Set lighted lamps adrift (in Vitasta)
Observed the birthday, put vermilion
On its forehead
he observed Veth Truvah[17] on the banks
Of Vitasta at Khanqah[18]
he called out from memory
brought forth the First Truth
The Bhatta[19] remebered seven generations
In his morning oblation
In our strength of belief
We uttered 'eleven, eleven'
Made the 'eleven-named'[20] come
Our tongue was already pure.
And then we read the kalma[21]
Fountainhead of knowledge.
Many came through the ages
We read them in our own way
We embraced the floodtide, held drifting fire
The Sea of Knowledge, in its introspection
Took a deep draught.

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16. Budshah : Zainal Abidin, the illustrious and much loved ruler of Kashmir. 17. Veth Truvah : Vitasta Trayodashi, the birthday of river Vitasta (traditional). 18. Khanqah : The mosque of Shah Hamdan, a very holy shrine of Kashmir. 19. bhatta : Kashmiri (and also Sanskrit) nomenclature for Kashmiri Pandits. 20. Eleven named : Appellation for Dastgir Sahib, a sufi saint A memorial mosque in Srinagar. 21. Kalma : The Muslim incantation of Faith Literally, word or speech.

Good sons : Abhinava[22], Kalhana[23] and Vasugupta[24]
The articulate, perusing tomes of truth and rectitude
Are dumb now
Lalla[25] made us suckle the mother's milk
Of Vaakh[26]
Should I not cry, cry out in despair
For why have I lost my articulation ?
In our Rishi garden[27] were Yogis
Yoginis and Sufis
Satiating the thirst
Of the departed in heaven
With knowledge.
With Shrukh[28] did Nund Rishi[29] unravel
Ties and knots
Get up, someone
make them hear, ask
Did you happen to see my childhood of Yore ?
Was our old fortune not full of bloom ?
What dosha has come about
the siblings have had a tiff, separated
In enmity does
A brother stalk another, Yet
Is a brother the support of the other

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22. Abhinava : Abhinavagupta, paramacharya of Shaiva tradition, author of 40 works. 23. Kalhana : The great historian, author of Rajatarangini : the earliest recorded hisotry. 24. Vasugupta : Great Shaiva scholar and philosopher, author of Shiva Sutra. 25. Lalla : Lal ded or Lalleshwari, the greatest poetess of Kashmir. 26. Vaakh : A poetic form in which Lalded wrote, also edict or write, literally. 27. Rishi garden : kashmir is called thus because of being the abode of the Rishis. 28. Shrukh : A poetic form in which Nund Rishi wrote also, literally. 29. Nund Rishi : Sheikh Noor-U-Deen Vali, the patron saint of Kashmir, founder of the Rishi cult. Also known as Alamdar-i-Kashmir (Standard bearer of Kashmir).

Ultimately
A family is in its members
It is an old saying
The way is ever moving
Movement is happiness, sorrow
Which Abhinava will come
Sing a paean to Rudra
Will Shant Rasa[30] abate, rein in Tandava
The buildings we sculpted with our Pandava hands
Stone by stone have we taken them apart
What is left ?
When word revealed meaning
Rivers cascaded down
The meaning of words lost was
Learning wiped off
Lalla has come forth, wearing
Heavenly robes of Fire
Seeing all, She will jump back
Into the fire place
Nund Rishi will emege
And wander, scanning tombs
'One and one are eleven
The last ritual fire[31]
We had houses supporting each other
They are burnt down now.
The hawk chased doves
of the heavenly abode away

30. Shant Rasa : The ninth Rasa not included in Bharata's natya Shastra. Abhinavagupta recognises it as a basic Rasa in his work, Abhinava Bharat. 31. Last ritual fire : Cremation : also the numeral ten.

Wounded bodies bear the pall
Of a dead one
The hermits of smoking urns
Under Chinar[32] shade, have fled
Alas ! Time has corralled
The children of destiny'
Poshikuj[33], decrepit, with her pathetic sack of utensils
Is going around, back bent, seeking refuge
zoon[34] is crying her heart out
In the
She has lost her grown up sons
All seven of them.
"Tell me-how do you read my expression ?
Does universal time have a distinct visage
Of its own ?
Only I be the salve for my grief
And the mourner
Today I am exiled
With a land my own
Did you happen to see
Santosh[35] of Yore ?"

Translated from Kashmiri
by Shantiveer Kaul

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32. Chinar : The premier tree indigenous to Kashmir. Belonging to the maple variety. 33. Poshikuj : name, female, Kashmiri pandit. Literally, flowering plant. 34. Zoon : name, female, Kashmiri Muslim. Literally, the moon. 35. Santosh : Name of the poet. Also contentment.